



# Review of Coordination Needs Within Virginia's Education System

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## BACKGROUND

Concerns have been expressed about the extent to which high school graduates in Virginia are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and the workplace. There is a significant gap (about one-half) between the number of students who attend college and the number who complete a degree program. Better coordination between the K-12 and higher education systems could help to reduce this gap. These education systems have traditionally operated independently of each other. The Department of Education (DOE) oversees the K-12 school divisions, the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) oversees the community colleges, and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) oversees the postsecondary institutions and VCCS. Each of these agencies has its own governing board. The Secretary of Education is empowered to provide overall policy direction and resolve conflicts among agencies, but has no authority to direct their management, budget, or staff.

The goals of the Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011 ("Top Jobs" Act) is an example of the need for coordination. The act calls for 100,000 more college graduates over the next 15 years and an increase in enrollment in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Postsecondary institutions must coordinate with the K-12 system to begin preparing students for these fields of study.

## KEY FINDINGS

We reviewed the Secretary of Education's role in improving coordination among the Commonwealth's public education systems and noted the following:

- Many aspects of Virginia's education system are well coordinated. The schools and postsecondary institutions work together to address student readiness for college, student transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions, teacher preparation, career training and guidance, and data needs.
- Additional coordination is needed, however. For example, coordination needs to improve between high school and community college career and technical education programs and between colleges that train teachers and the schools that employ those teachers. Agencies that are developing a longitudinal data system to track student outcomes from prekindergarten through college need to plan for long-term coordination.
- No single entity is accountable for the education system as a whole, and the extent to which coordination will continue is uncertain unless structural changes are enacted.

## SUMMARY OF SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- DOE and VCCS should assess (1) the coordination of career and technical education programs between the high schools and community colleges and (2) whether the funding split of the federal grant for these programs is appropriate. Currently, DOE receives 85% of the funding and VCCS receives 15%.
- An ongoing mechanism for coordination and accountability is needed. An education coordinating council composed of education and business leaders and chaired by the Secretary of Education should be established to identify and address system-wide issues. DOE, VCCS, and SCHEV should establish agency liaisons to each of the other education governing boards.